

# 'Missile Gap' Emerging as Myth That Produced Sweeping Effects On U.S. Armament and Politics

## Concern Over Nonexistent Soviet Lead Caused Apparently Meaningless Ex- pansion in American, Russian Arsenal

FIRST OF A SERIES

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FOUR YEARS AFTER THE CLIMAX of the controversy, the nonexistent "missile gap," born of unsubstantiated fear that the Russians were ahead of us, emerges as one of the most dramatically significant myths in American history.

Although official opinions on the subject vary greatly, this is the unmistakable conclusion to be found in examining views of present and former military and civilian leaders of the Eisenhower-Kennedy-Johnson administrations.

Initially, I asked Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner, former adviser of President John F. Kennedy and now dean of science of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, whether the Kennedy forces had knowingly exploited in the 1960 campaign a "missile gap" that did not exist.

Wiesner, who assisted the missile effort in major degree in both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, denied this. In reply, he suggested that this story be written, and arranged for some of the interviews, in the belief that it would constitute a public service through clarification of the historic events involved.

I HAVE talked with, or been given, the authorized views of more than a dozen persons whose positions offered them some first-hand knowledge of the events involved. As a result, I have concluded that, despite the fact there never was any such thing, the "missile gap" produced these results, among others:

(1) It stimulated a United States-Soviet Union missile race, in which the United States maintains a 4-to-1 lead as the result of a 17 billion-dollar program initiated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and accelerated by President Kennedy.

(2) It caused both nations to double their missile arsenals approximately so that, as advocates of gradual disarmament are quick to point out, our relative positions remain the same, despite the expenditure of billions. By early 1965, the Soviet Union will have 200 intercontinental ballistic missiles, double the number of a year earlier. By the same time, the United States will have 925 ICBMs, compared with 475 a year earlier.

(3) It provoked nationwide fears that marred unjustly the records of both the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations and provided one of the major issues that defeated Vice President Richard M. Nixon and elected Kennedy to the White House.

THE EISENHOWER Administration was not delinquent in its preparedness program, as Senator Stuart Symington (Dem., Missouri), a former Air Force Secretary, and others charged (and some Republicans in government believed).

The Kennedy team was not deceitful when it said that a missile gap threatened this country in the campaign months of 1960 and announced, after the election, that it did not exist. The shift was due to more and better intelligence, and to the fact that Kennedy, as a campaigning Senator, was denied missile information possessed by the White House.

As Democratic candidate for President, Kennedy was barred

a full-scale briefing on United States-Soviet missile strength at Strategic Air Command Headquarters in Omaha. The briefing had been promised to him by the Republican Administration.

FORMER Senator Pierre Salinger (Dem.), California, who was President Kennedy's press secretary, related, "We (the Kennedy campaign entourage) went to SAC headquarters with the understanding that the Senator (Kennedy) was to be fully briefed.

"Apparently, the night before, there were orders from Washington that he was not to get a full briefing. The Senator was damned mad about it.

"I can't say the orders denying Kennedy a full briefing came from President Eisenhower, but certainly from or via the Secretary of Defense (Thomas S. Gates Jr.).

When I questioned Salinger, he replied, "I don't know why the Pentagon order was given."

Denied facts of the "missile gap" in possession of the Eisenhower Administration, Kennedy was more inclined to listen to those advisers, including Symington, who felt it was a major issue.

TWO MONTHS after the visit to SAC headquarters, the full ramifications of the Omaha rebuke to the successful Democratic candidate were made clear to President Kennedy's advisers, Walter Rostow and Wiesner. Wiesner and Rostow, an MIT economics professor later appointed to the government by Kennedy and now chairman of the Department of State policy-planning council, were in Moscow attending a conference of East-West scientists.

Soviet Deputy Minister Vasilyevich Kuznetsov, who knew Wiesner from an international convention on safeguards against surprise attack in 1958, sent a message to Wiesner, asking whether the latter would like to see him. Wiesner said that he would and suggested that Rostow come, too.

In his office in the Foreign Ministry, Kuznetsov commented that he had become aware, from U.S. news coverage of Kennedy's campaign speeches, that the President was being pressed to double the Eisenhower Administration's missile program.

understand, at least in part, the Kennedy campaign commitment to build a strong military force. But he pointed out that the Soviet government also faced pressures from its military leadership and assuredly would not be able to resist them if the United States persisted in increasing greatly its missile strength.

Thus the stage was set for a continuation of the highly competitive U.S.-Soviet missile race.

OTHER military and civilian leaders whose views have made possible the piecing together of this story from its beginnings include:

Allen Dulles, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, stated, "By '57, we began to

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